

What is Pre-Fire Management?

California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection

Since 1923, more than 15,000 homes and other structures have been damaged or destroyed by wildfires in California. By placing the emphasis on what needs to be done long before a fire starts, Pre-Fire Management actions can reduce property losses, fire fighting costs, increase firefighter safety, and contribute to ecosystem health.

Pre-fire activities such as clearing a *defensible space*, putting in and maintaining *fire safe landscaping*, utilizing *prescribed fire*, creating *fuel breaks*, and practicing *forest management* are proven methods of reducing wildfire destruction.

In 2003, over 3,700 homes were destroyed by wildfires in Southern California alone. Pre-Fire Management is a term all Californian's living in a wildland setting need to know.



While the fire burned all around, defensible space, gave firefighters the chance to save this home.

Defensible Space

When you remove flammable vegetation and create a fire safe landscape of at least 100 feet, you create a "defensible space" - an area that will help protect your home and provide a safety zone for the firefighters who are battling the flames.

This defensible space around your home and other structures will not only provide you with the greatest chance for survival, it is also required by California law (PRC 4291). Check with your local fire department for defensible space requirements in your area.

Fire Safe Landscaping

Defensible space does not mean bare dirt. Fire safe landscaping around your home and other structures means:

Using fire resistant plants with native species and green lawn;

Spacing trees and shrubs at least 10 feet apart;

Removing lower tree branches within six feet of the ground; and

Maintaining your landscaping with regular watering and weeding.



Prescribed Fires/Vegetation Management Program (VMP)

The use of “prescribed” or intentionally set fire under controlled circumstances, can remove unhealthy and dangerously overgrown vegetation before a wildfire strikes. Prescribed fire projects reduce the risk of large damaging wildfires while improving the growing conditions of native plants and wildlife.

The CDF Vegetation Management Program (VMP) is a cost-sharing program with landowners that focuses on the use of prescribed fire, and mechanical means, for addressing wildland fire fuel hazards and other resource management issues on State Responsibility Area (SRA) lands.



A VMP burn removes the dense underbrush without killing the trees.

Fuel Breaks

Fuel breaks are wide strips of land on which trees and vegetation have been significantly, and in some cases permanently, reduced or removed. They may also be large greenbelt areas built into communities. These areas can slow, and even stop, the spread of a wildland fire because they provide fewer fuels to carry the flames. They also provide firefighters with safe zones to take a stand against a wildfire, or retreat from flames if the need arises.



The varying pattern, and vegetation left throughout this fuel break, serves to blend better with the environment and maintains wildlife habitat.

Forest Management

Unthinned, unmanaged, densely-packed forested and vegetated areas provide ample fuel for flames to spread. Well-managed forests and wildland areas reduce fire hazard, improve forest health, wildlife habitat, and watershed resources.

This is an un-thinned forest. The trees are densely packed. If flames get into this area they will easily spread from tree to tree.



This is that same area of forest after a wildfire burned through. Note the trees in the stand that have been completely scorched. If this forest had been managed through selective thinning many more trees would be left with their foliage.